

# SPEECH

OF

## ALFRED IVERSON, OF GEORGIA,

ON

### THE OREGON TERRITORY BILL;

AND THE

### PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION.

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DELIVERED IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, JULY 26, 1848.

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The position which I occupy, as a member of Congress, was conferred upon me, not only without solicitation upon my part, but in opposition to my declared wishes. At the time of my nomination, I had no desire to engage in public life, but circumstances which I could not control, placed it out of my power to decline the nomination of my political friends, which resulted in my election to this House. Having long since determined to retire to private life again, at the close of my present term—having no personal object to accomplish, no private interest to subserve, and no political ambition to gratify, I have, heretofore, with a brief exception, abstained from participation in the discussions in this Hall, and left them to be conducted by those who were more able and more willing to engage in them than myself. And if the ordinary subjects of Congressional legislation had alone occupied our attention, I should not have departed from the silence which I had imposed upon myself, and which I much prefer to have preserved.

But, sir, a subject has sprung up in our midst, of no ordinary character—a question in which my own immediate constituents, in common with the whole South, have a vital and absorbing interest. Nay, sir, it is a question affecting, not only the constitutional rights, and most valuable pecuniary interests of the South, but is one upon which the fate of this Union depends.

The slave property of the Southern States cannot be estimated at a less value than twelve hundred millions of dollars. The whole of this vast property, the political power which it confers, the constitutional rights by which it is guarantied, are, in my opinion, in imminent peril; remote, it may be, but still in imminent peril.

It is in vain that gentlemen from the North tell us they do not intend to disturb the compromises of the Constitution, or interfere with slavery in the States. When, sir, has the North observed, in good faith, any compromise which it has made with the South? The constitutional provision prohibiting the importation of slaves from abroad after 1808, was founded upon a reciprocal clause providing for the restoration of slaves escaping from the slave into the free States. And how has this compromise been observed by the North? By the passage of laws, in many of them, devised with all the ingenuity of human talents and skill, to frustrate, and render abortive, this important and essential right, thus guarantied to the South. In others, by the formation of societies, in many cases, protected by legal enactments, and countenanced and encouraged by leading men, the avowed objects of which are to seduce slaves to escape from their owners, and to prevent, by fraud or

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force, their capture and restoration. In violation of the spirit, if not the letter of the Constitution, laws have been passed, giving the right of trial by jury to the slave who has escaped from his owner, and has been arrested as a runaway; thus subjecting the rights of the owner to the arbitrament of a packed and prejudiced tribunal. Who does not see and know, that under the operation of these laws, the active interference of these societies, and the influence of public prejudice at the North, this constitutional guarantee to the South is a mere mockery? And, sir, the memorable tariff compromise of 1833, how has it been observed? A compromise growing out of the most alarming convulsions at the South, which had their foundation in a settled conviction of injustice and oppression. What has been its fate? Violated, disregarded, trampled under the foot of Northern Whig cupidity, at the very first moment of its political ascendancy. And the compromise, upon which rests the celebrated ordinance of 1787, where is it now? Denied, forgotten, or despised. And, sir, the Missouri compromise, one entered into by the South in derogation of its rights and interests, but agreed to that harmony might be preserved, and this Union saved from dissolution. How long will it stand as a monument of Northern justice and good faith? From what quarter is its violation unblushingly advocated and imperiously demanded? Look, sir, at the universal voice of the great Whig party at the North, spoken in tones not to be misunderstood from the public press, from primary meetings and conventions, and from the halls of legislation. Look to the voice and votes of that party now in Congress, all, without a solitary exception, pointing to the same direction. Look to the action of a portion of the Democratic party at the North, especially in New York. Look to the lamentable and ominous shrinking in the halls of Congress of members of that party which has heretofore stood by the constitutional rights of the South, upon this important, trying, momentous subject. Can any man look at these things and say that the Missouri compromise could pass this Congress, or is likely to be adopted at any subsequent time? And, sir, if this compromise, as well as that now under consideration in the Senate, shall be trampled down—if, in violation of that spirit of harmony and brotherly love which dictated them, slavery shall be excluded, by congressional legislation, from New Mexico and California, I ask, what security will the South have for the faithful observance of any of the compromises of the Constitution? What guarantee will we have that slavery will be left undisturbed in the States? Sir, it is in vain to listen to the syren song of security, when there is no security. We cannot rely upon the "*punica fides*" which has been exhibited by a majority of our Northern brethren. Ten years ago, and there were not fifty members of Congress who advocated the power of Congress over the subject of slavery in the Territories. Now, a decided majority from the free States are the open advocates of the power, and the urgent friends of its exercise. Ten years ago, and scarcely a voice was heard against the maintenance of the Missouri compromise. Now, who believes that it will ever be recognised or adopted again? Ten years ago, and who thought that opposition to slavery would ever form the only test of political qualification amongst any respectable portion of the American people? Now, what do we behold? Large masses of both political parties at the North, disregarding old associations, breaking up old political ties and party organization, lead on and headed by able and eminent men, boldly avowing this as the only element of the approaching presidential election, and the only foundation for political preferment. The gentleman from Virginia, (Mr. FLOURNOY,) who addressed the House, some days since, with so much spirit and energy, as well as ability, deprecated the agitation of this subject,



and wishes to exclude it from the Presidential canvass. He apprehends no danger to an amicable and equitable settlement of the question after the election is over. Sir, I am aware that this is the desperate game which the Southern Whig leaders intend to play in the contest. They wish to lull the South into security—a security as delusive as it will be fatal. Having abandoned to the exactions of their Northern allies the interests and long settled political principles of the South, upon all other questions of public concern which have agitated the popular mind in the past struggles for party ascendancy, they are now ready to fold their arms in listless, fatal indifference, and trust to the tender mercies of those who, upon this subject, have never exhibited either justice or mercy. They would urge the South into silence and security, in the hope that the North will hush its agitation and do justice.

But, sir, it is in vain that the gentleman and his coadjutors, here and elsewhere, raise their voices to lull this storm to repose. Like the ghost of Banquo, “it will not down at his bidding.” Like subterranean fires, it will continue to upheave the bosom of the North, unless stilled by the reproofing voice of the American people, uttered at the ballot-box in November next. No, sir, the South has no security in this matter, but in its own courage, firmness, and unanimity, and in the good faith, generous friendship, and moral firmness of those Northern Democrats who, in the midst of the storm which is sweeping with such fearful violence over the free States, have stood by the Constitution, and the spirit of conciliation and compromise which lies at its foundation. It is in vain, we are told by the advocates of the Wilmot Proviso on this floor and elsewhere, that they never intend to interfere with the institution of domestic slavery, as it exists in the States of this Union. We have witnessed the steady and rapid march of the foul fiend of abolitionism, until it is already in sight of our very threshold. Where will it stop? Who can say that it will not enter? When, sir, were the foot prints of fanaticism ever seen on their voluntary retreat? No, sir, it ever marches with relentless strides and accelerated speed to the consummation of its object. Trampling down in its mad career the forms of law, the demands of justice, and the obligations of humanity, its torch is only extinguished by the shed blood of the last victim of its unrelenting and ruthless vengeance! Like the odious reptile whose only food is blood, its morbid and rapacious appetite increases with the food upon which it feeds, and though gorged and bloated with the digesting load, it still cries give, give! “Like the seas, which not content with what they have, would stretch their arms to grasp in all the shore.” Sir, the final result and inevitable end of this rapidly advancing anti-slavery movement at the North, if unchanged and unchecked at the outset by the firm resistance of the only party in this Union which is either willing or able to avert it, is the total overthrow of slavery in the United States, or the dissolution of our glorious confederacy. One or the other is as certain as the decrees of fate. The first step in this great political and fanatical drama is the one now demanded, the exclusion of slavery from the newly acquired Territories of this Republic. If the South submits, the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia will follow in quick succession—then the overthrow of the slave trade between the States—then the application of the public treasure, drained from Southern pockets by partial laws and extravagant tariffs, to the purchase of Southern slaves from Southern owners—and, lastly, universal emancipation by act of Congress. Shall I be told, as we are told even by Southern men, “that the Constitution of the United States recognizes slavery, and guaranties this property in the several States, and that there is no danger?” Sir, what barrier has constitutions ever presented to men impelled by interest, roused by passion, inflamed by prejudice, maddened by fanaticism, and lost

to the dictates of reason and justice? No, sir, these turbulent waves of domestic faction, lashed into fury by political demagogues, will sweep with resistless force over every constitutional barrier which may be in their way. Let the Southern people look to their safety now, before they have gathered irresistible power—*now* while the remedy is in our hands—“*now* is the day, and *now* the hour of our salvation”—now, whilst a portion of our Northern brethren are disposed to listen to the voice of reason, to the calls of justice, and the requirements of the Constitution. Sir, the safety of the South rests in this very Presidential election, and its effects upon the parties of this Union. The election over, and it may be beyond the power of the South to save itself from the overpowering influence of public opinion at the North. If this question be yielded to Congress with no check but the popular will, who does not see that the South must be sacrificed to the unscrupulous demands of a prejudiced majority. If the South, lulled to security by the exhortations of Whig leaders, shall shut their eyes to the effects and results of the Presidential election upon this all important subject, the day of safety and settlement will have forever passed. Let Southern members call then upon their Northern friends for justice, for conciliation, and compromise. The same fatal and solemn response will be heard, which in sepulchral tones lately sounded the death knell of monarchy in France—“It is too late! too late!” The gentleman from Virginia invokes the South to be still, and to fear nothing. Let Whigery succeed, and all will be well; that patriotic men at the North and South will come together and settle this distracting question upon just and honorable terms. Rely upon it, sir, this is “a promise to the ear,” which will be “broken to the hope.” What is the South to expect from the Whigs of the North after the election, favorable to its rights and interests upon the subject of slavery? Let the future be judged by the past. What support, what sympathy, what “aid and comfort” have we ever received from the hands of Northern Whigs? What voice has been raised from out its numerous ranks, to cheer the South and give it assurance of safety? In primary assemblies of the people, in State Conventions and State Legislatures, and in the Halls of Congress, what Northern Whig has ever given his vote in support of Southern rights? Where is the man of that party in any free State who has had the will or the independence to stand up for the South, and resist the storm of popular prejudice which has characterized that party? And is it so, sir, that out of fifteen States in this Union, stretching from the Atlantic, along the great lakes, across the Ohio, to the far regions of the mighty West, there has not been one voice raised, or one vote given in behalf of Southern rights and interests, from out the swelling ranks of the great Whig party? Are all, *all* who bear the name or practice the principles of Whig, united in open and hostile array against the South, upon a question involving such vital consequences to her interests, her rights, her existence? And is it to be believed, that a “change will come over the spirit of their dreams” after the Presidential election? No, sir, the gentleman from Virginia deceives himself, if he supposes that there is one Northern Whig on the floor of Congress who will vote with him or me for a fair and just arrangement of this vexed question any more after the election than before it, for any settlement of it which can or ought to be acceptable to his constituents or mine. Is there one Northern Whig in this Hall, or in the Senate, who is prepared to vote against the Wilmot Proviso? If there be, let him be named. There is not one. Is there one who will vote for the Missouri compromise? Is there one who will vote to leave the matter in the hands of the people of the Territories themselves? And are these men, or those who may come after them, likely to change front after the election, and give up long, settled, and dearly cherished opin-



ions, upon a subject in which their opinions meet the universal approval of their constituents? Do the Whig members from the South, on this floor, apply such a flattering unction to their souls? If they do, they are grossly deceived; and if they are deceived themselves, believe me, sir, their constituents will not be, by any such delusive hope. They know that opposition to slavery, and its total exclusion from the Territories of the Union, is a deep-seated, abiding, absorbing, cardinal feature in the creed of Northern Whiggery.

What, then, is the South to gain by excluding the question from the canvass, or postponing its decision beyond the Presidential election? Sir, the future safety of the South, I verily believe, depends upon the fate of the Presidential election, and the vote which the South gives in view of the danger which threatens it from the North. Deriving neither "aid or comfort" from the Whig party of the free States, from what source is the South to look for sympathy and support? If the question becomes a sectional one, the South is in a minority in both Houses of Congress, and who does not see that, so far as the Northern Whigs are concerned, it is already a sectional question? At present our safety depends in part upon the friendship and firmness of a portion of the Northern Democracy. Thanks to a spirit of justice and independence, deserving all praise, there are *some* on this side of the House in this Hall, who, though reviled and deserted by Southern Whigs, and threatened with popular vengeance at home by Northern Whigs, are yet breasting the storm which has been raised to destroy them, and stand here to-day, as they have ever stood, the firm undaunted defenders of the sacred compromises of the Constitution. And if the dark, angry current of Northern abolitionism, swelling and sweeping with the accumulated mass of the whole Whig party at the North, and gaining force and strength by deserters from the ranks of Democracy, shall become too powerful for resistance; if, consulting their self preservation, the first great ruling law of our nature, some of our Northern friends here should falter in the hour of trial, and the rights of the South be trodden down in this Hall, we have another source of safety in those Northern Democratic Senators who stand out in bold relief as the friends of the constitutional rights of the South. Sir, let every Southern man look at this thing as it really stands. Let him not close his eyes to the fact, that if the Wilmot proviso is rejected by this or any other Congress, if the just rights of the South shall be preserved and protected, it must be *alone* by the aid of Democratic members from the non slaveholding States. But if, contrary to our confident expectations, our Democratic allies in Congress shall give way upon this subject, the South has yet another and a higher source of security, in the conservative power of the Executive veto. Whilst the present incumbent of the Executive chair shall remain in office, neither the sacred compromises of the Constitution or the just rights of the South are in danger. Sir, however much James K. Polk has been ridiculed and abused by those whose greatest pleasure and most grateful avocation is to detract from the well-earned fame of honest men, he has the wisdom to understand and the firmness to maintain the great principles which lie at the foundation of our Republican institutions—equality of rights, equality of privileges, and equality of burdens. How fortunate for the South, how fortunate for the Union, that in this eventful crisis of its fate, the Executive power of the nation has been conferred upon one who received the Republican mantle from the dying hands of that stern old man, who once lived in the house, who yet lives in the hearts, and who will forever live in the grateful memory, of the American people! But, sir, "*Tempora mutantur, et mutamur cum illis.*" A few months only will pass away before the people will be called upon to elect their Representatives to another Congress. If this slavery question shall not be settled at this ses-

sion of Congress, that dark, angry current of abolitionism, which is now sweeping with such fearful and increasing violence and velocity over all the free States of this Union, may overwhelm those Democratic members in this Hall, and strike down that small, but gallant squad of Democratic Senators who have thus far breasted the storm, and given the only "aid and comfort" to the South which it has ever derived, or ever will derive, from the Northern portion of this Confederacy, in that venerable and venerated body. And if the people of the South shall be deceived and deluded by those acts of deception and fraud which have marked the conduct and procured the success of the Whig party upon another memorable occasion in the history of the country, and which from present appearances are to be the main weapons used by the same party, in the approaching contest, the Executive power of this nation itself, the last, best hope of safety to the South, may be placed in the hands of one who, whatever may be his identity of interest and policy with the South, cannot, will not, *dare not*, consistently with his solemn pledges, protect it, by the arm of the Executive veto from the unfriendly enactments of a Congressional majority. Sir, let the South look to it—let every man who has its interests, its rights, and its honor at heart, see to it, that so far as his vote and voice are concerned, this great conservative power of the Constitution, upon which alone we may have to rely for safety, shall not be placed in the hands of one who will be but "clay in the hands of the potter"—one who, whatever may be his claims upon the admiration and gratitude of his country for deeds of noble daring, stands pledged, if elected President, to yield his own opinions to the will of Congress. Will it be said, sir, that General Taylor has reserved to himself the exercise of the veto power against clear unconstitutional infraction, or precipitate and hasty legislation? What security to the South is there in this reservation? Let it be examined with all fairness and candor. Can it be alleged that any bill passed by Congress excluding slavery from the Territories of the United States could be considered the result of hasty legislation? That a bill to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia would be precipitate legislation; or that any other Congressional action upon the subject of slavery, however much it might affect the rights and interests of the South, would be off-hand and unadvised legislation? a subject which has been, and will continue to be, the theme of constant, long continued and anxious agitation in every section of the Union. Will any body pretend that this subject can ever assume the sudden and hasty form of law, in whatever shape it may be adopted by Congress? No, sir. If ever a fatal blow shall be struck against the South, it will be a premeditated, deliberate act of iniquity and injury. How then could General Taylor interpose the Executive veto to save the country from the fatal effects of such a blow, upon the pretence that it was the result of hasty Congressional legislation? Will it be said again that all such action of Congress would be clearly unconstitutional, and that, therefore, General Taylor would veto it? Sir, what do we know of the constitutional opinions of General Taylor upon this or any other subject? Has he ever formed or avowed one? And is the South ready and willing to trust this most important and vital subject to the hands of one who has no avowed principles or opinions upon which it can repose in safety?

But, sir, so far as General Taylor has expressed any opinion upon the subject, is it not against the South? In his celebrated "Signal" letter he gave his sanction and approval to the ordinance of 1787, by which slavery was excluded from the Northwestern Territory, embracing the States of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Michigan, the baneful cause and foundation of all the fearful agitation which now threatens us. Besides,



sir, is not this power of Congress over the subject of slavery in the Territories and in the District of Columbia a mooted question? Do we not know that the *whole* Whig party at the North, and a large portion of the Democrats, claim the constitutional power of Congress over the whole subject? And is it not even sometimes conceded by Southern politicians? Is it so clear, as a constitutional proposition, that there may exist no difference of opinion upon the subject? Is its unconstitutionality written in such large and glaring letters "that he who runs may read?" How, then, in the absence of any expressed or known opinion of Gen. Taylor, can we reasonably suppose that he would consider the Wilmot proviso as a clear and palpable violation of the Constitution? And, sir, what point is better settled in political practice, than that he who is elevated to power by a party, must conform, in all essential and important measures, to the opinions and principles of those who have conferred office upon him? And who will deny that a large majority of that party upon whom Gen. Taylor relies for his election, are the uncompromising advocates of the Wilmot proviso?

Is it to be supposed, then, that General Taylor would veto any measure which received the sanction and suffrage of a decided majority of his political friends? But, sir, I ask if it is not already well understood by those upon whom he must mainly depend for success, that if elected President he will not interfere with the action of Congress upon this subject? Sir, the letters of distinguished Northern Whigs; positive and public allegations of members of Congress; resolutions of Whig ratification meetings; and the almost universal declarations of the Northern Whig papers, speak out plainly upon this point. They support General Taylor because they understand and *believe* that upon this, as well as all other questions of domestic policy, he will yield to the decisions of Congress. Sir, does any man believe that Gen. Taylor would have received the nomination of the Philadelphia Convention, if it had been known or *believed* that he would veto the Wilmot proviso? Will the miserable pretence be set up, that because a Wilmot proviso resolution was laid upon the table in that Convention, that therefore a majority of that body were opposed to that proviso? Sir, it has been admitted on this floor by a distinguished gentleman from Massachusetts, a member of that Convention, that a decided majority of that Convention were in favor of that proviso; and no honorable man who is familiar with the composition of that body, will contend that it intended to condemn the Wilmot proviso by any portion of its action. And is any man so blind as to suppose that by the nomination and support of General Taylor, the majority in that Convention intended to yield up their opposition to slavery and surrender the principles of the Wilmot proviso? No, sir. Both in that Convention and elsewhere, the Northern Whigs support him, not only because he is a Whig, but because they distinctly *understand* and *believe* that he will not oppose their peculiar views upon the subject of slavery, or interfere with their designs upon the rights and interests of the South. And how is this, sir? Do the Whigs at the North support General Taylor with the *understanding* that he is not to veto the Wilmot proviso if passed by Congress? And do the Southern Whigs support him with the *same* understanding? If they do, they are recreant to their principles, regardless of their interests, and lost to the dictates of truth and honor. No, sir, there is not a Southern man upon this floor or elsewhere, if, in the exercise of common charity, we give them credit for sincerity, who believes that Gen. Taylor is unsound upon the subject of slavery—that he would not veto the Wilmot proviso. Every mail which comes from the South is freighted with the most positive and unequivocal aver-

ments of the Whig press, that General Taylor is with the South on this question, and would veto the Wilmot proviso; and, sir, if it were known, believed, or suspected at the South that he would sanction that measure, he would not carry a corporal's guard in the approaching election. And yet this is the discreditable, I had almost said, the dishonorable position of the Whig party and of General Taylor, that whilst one portion of it are urging his election upon the South as the only ark of its political safety, another portion are pressing his election at the North, on account of his adherence to their own peculiar views upon this identical subject! Is it fair in General Taylor to fold his arms in silence and permit his opinions and intentions to be subjected to such opposing and contradictory constructions? Is it honorable in him to seek office and power by a fraudulent concealment of his opinions? That a fraud will be practised upon a large portion of the public, if this thing continues, is too palpable to be denied. Where is that noble spirit of independence and manliness displayed by General Taylor in the memorable declaration, that he "asked no favors, and shunned no responsibility?" Is it hushed by the still, small voice of political ambition? Is Zachary Taylor *ashamed* or *afraid* to avow his opinions upon the great political questions deeply agitating the public mind and affecting the public interests? Sir, if he shall continue to close his lips and permit any portion of the American people to be deceived about his opinions—if he does not act a manly part, and place himself and his opinions, especially upon this great subject of slavery, fairly and unequivocally before the world, he will forfeit the respect, as I trust he will lose the support, of all honorable men, to whatever party they may belong. The South especially owes it to its own self-respect, as well as the preservation of its domestic institutions, to see that the Executive power of this Government shall not be placed in the hands of any man whose opinions are unknown, or whose position and course have not been clearly defined. Sir, the South has already been too long lulled into security on the subject of slavery agitation at the North. The Southern Whig party has already done too much, by the fatal course which it has pursued, to aid in the downfall of Southern institutions. What has been its course? It has allied itself in bonds of fraternal association with a party at the North that has been for years, and is now, the open, active, violent opponent of Southern institutions; that party which has been the foundation and main support of all the political agitation upon this delicate and dangerous subject of slavery; that party which, by its insidious, constant, inflammatory appeals to the religious prejudices and passions of men, has raised a storm against the South throughout the free States, which, like a maelstrom, threatens to engulf all in its rapacious and enormous bosom. Sir, when a Whig in the Northern States, casting aside for the time the old issues which have divided the two great political parties of the Union, and appealing to the sectional feelings of the people, has obtained office by reviling the South and her institutions, have you heard from Southern Whigs a single voice raised in condemnation of his course? When, taking hold of the popular prejudices of the masses against domestic slavery, he has been enabled to beat down a Democrat who has stood firmly by the South, maintained her just rights, and defended her against the illiberal aspersions of his antagonist, has such a man ever been repudiated by his Southern allies? No, sir; on the contrary, he has been hailed with friendly greetings, and rejoicings loud and long have gone up from Southern Whig throats for the victory won over "a Northern man with Southern principles." When a renegade Democrat at the North has abandoned his prin-



ciples, deserted his party, and seized upon the subject of slavery to make it the instrument and the stepping stone of his success, he has been hailed by Southern Whigs with smiles of joy, and with all due form and solemnity has been admitted to the cordial embrace of the great Whig church. Sir, what party at the South has rejoiced over the success of the Slades, Everetts, the Giddings, the Palfreys, *et id omne genus*? Who, sir, have rejoiced at the apostasy of a Hale? When that man, forgetting the obligations which he owed to the sterling, unflinching Democracy of the Granite State, seized upon the Texas question as a political hobby, and placing himself in opposition to the great body of his political associates, uttered the bitterest denunciations against the South, by what party was he sustained, and by whose votes has he been elevated to power? He was *spewed out* of the mouth of the Democratic party throughout the Union, like a poisonous drug too nauseating and disgusting to be retained, to be received into the arms of the Whig party, to be raised to an important and imposing station by Whig votes, and to become the political friend and associate of Southern Whigs on the floor of the Senate. And, sir, this is only one of numerous examples which might be adduced of the *fidelity* of Southern Whigs to Southern interests, and its *fraternity* with "Northern men with Northern principles." It has been this very course of the Whig party at the South, which has given life, and health, and strength to this dangerous anti-slavery movement, which is now sweeping with terrific velocity over all the free States of the Confederacy.

Sir, it cannot be denied, that the only party at the North, from which the South has ever received sympathy and support upon this question of slavery, is the Democratic party. Ten years ago, and that party were almost unanimous in our favor. In every vote taken, as well in the State Legislatures as in Congress, in which the question of slavery was involved, there was scarcely a Democratic voice raised against the constitutional rights of the Southern States. And, sir, if it had received the sympathy and support of the South which were due to friendship and fidelity, that party would, at this day, have stood an unbroken and impassable barrier to the encroachments of abolition. But, sir, how have they been treated by their Whig brethren at the South, in behalf of whose rights they have battled against popular prejudice and fanaticism at home? Look at the memorable scenes of 1840—Mr. Van Buren was then the open and avowed friend of Southern rights; he was surrounded and supported by a powerful party at the North, that stood by him in the bold, but dangerous position which he then assumed. But the Southern Whig party, instead of rallying to his support, and the support of those who gave us aid and comfort upon this most important and vital subject, ran wildly and madly into the support of one for the Presidential office who was the open and uncompromising advocate of the Wilmot proviso, and who, upon all other subjects, like Gen. Taylor, "had no political opinions for the public eye." Can we wonder, then, when we see the course which the South has pursued towards those who have risked their own political salvation at home, for the sake of the South, that they should give way and seek safety by swimming with the current under which they must otherwise have sunk? And is the same course to be pursued now? Is the South still so blind to the danger of its situation, that it should be willing to risk the destruction of its most sacred rights for the mere pride and gratification of party success? Are the Southern Whigs ready to sacrifice the South upon the altar of party devotion, that they may enjoy the fleeting pleasure to boast of victory, and swell the shouts of personal idolitry which are to be raised in honor of a military chieftain? Sir, in this dark and fearful hour of its peril, it behooves every son of the South, to pause and look before he leaps, lest a fatal step may plunge

him and his country into ruin. Sir, how different has been the course of the Southern Democracy! When have *we* ever rejoiced at the success of an enemy over a friend of the South? When have *we* ever welcomed a renegade abolition Whig into the ranks of Democracy, and given him the hand of political fellowship? When have *we* ever failed to put the seal of our condemnation upon any man who has made his opposition to Southern institutions the stalking horse upon which to ride into office? Look, sir, at the case which is now before the eyes of the nation, in the person of Martin Van Buren. If there was one man in this Union who stood higher than all others in the esteem and confidence of the Democrats of the South, it was Mr. Van Buren. In the memorable contest of 1840, when he was deserted by his Northern friends and abandoned by his own State, the Southern Democracy stood by him, and gave him two-thirds of the electoral votes which were cast for him upon that memorable occasion. Sir, Martin Van Buren has been endeared to the Democratic party of the whole Union, by the ties of a common faith, by the recollection of common dangers shared, of victories won, and battles lost. But he has deserted the South, and taken his stand in the ranks of its mortal enemies; and with the rapidity of the electric flash, which spread the news of his apostacy, he has been cast out from amongst us, like a dead dog upon a dunghill, there to *fester* and *rot*, amidst the corruption which surrounds him, and which he has so much contributed to accumulate. Yes, sir, that man who has heretofore been looked to as a model of political consistency—who was regarded as a great exemplar of Republican principles—who was the distinguished mark of his country's honor and the recipient of its favors, will descend to the grave with the brand of "*Traitor*" upon his forehead—bearing with him the contempt and scorn of all honorable men.

"Living, he shall forfeit fair renown,  
And doubly dying, shall go down  
To the vile dust from whence he sprang,  
Unwept, unhonored, and unsung."

Such, sir, has been, and is the difference in the course and conduct of the two parties on this subject. But, sir, if the Southern Whigs had, by their course heretofore, contributed to strengthen the hands of those who are our enemies at the North, and if the nomination and support of General Taylor is calculated to produce like results, and his election to aid in breaking down the only party at the North which has been friendly to the South, what are we to think of them, and how are we to characterise their conduct in the nomination and support of the present Whig candidate for Vice President? Sir, I charge the Southern members of the Philadelphia Convention, whatever may have been the honesty of their intentions, with a virtual abandonment of Southern rights and interests, in the nomination and support of Millard Fillmore for Vice President. What is his position upon this question of slavery? Is any Southern man upon this floor prepared to respond to this inquiry? When we ask, what are the views of General Taylor upon this subject, and charge him with leaning against the South, we are told by his Southern friends, that although he has made no public record of his opinions, yet that he is a Southern man, and a slaveholder, and *therefore* he may be safely trusted. But what answer do they give as to Mr. Fillmore? Upon what principle is *he* to be trusted? He is a Northern man, residing at the North, with all his interests at the North, surrounded by the party which has manifested such uncompromising hostility to Southern institutions—identified with it in position, party policy, and political power. The very office which he now holds, was conferred upon him by a convention in New York which unanimously adopted the Wilmot proviso as one of the essential arti-



cles of its political faith. These circumstances, without other evidence of his opinions, can leave no doubt upon the minds of candid men of his hostility to the South upon this subject of domestic slavery. Are Southern men ready to go blindfold into the support of a man for the important office of Vice President of the United States, whose opinions upon this question are either unknown or equivocal? It may be that the decision of this momentous question will depend upon the casting vote of the presiding officer of the Senate. The slaveholding States and non-slaveholding States are now equally divided. If a geographical division shall take the place of the present party lines, which recent events too plainly indicate, this whole question, upon the decision of which this Union depends, may rest upon the single vote of the Vice President. How important then, to the South, and to the whole country, that the occupant of that chair should be safe and sound upon this dangerous and distracting subject! But, sir, we are not left to conjecture or presumption as to the opinions of Mr. Fillmore upon this question. We have his recorded votes, not only in favor of the principles of the Wilmot proviso, but greatly beyond them, and in favor of principles which strike in distinct terms, at the institution of slavery in the *States* themselves. He was a member of Congress in 1838, when abolition petitions were pouring in from all quarters of the North, and when their reception and reference was the test between the friends and enemies of Southern rights. He was the uniform advocate of the reception of these incendiary documents. His votes upon the journals attest the truth of this assertion. Nay, more, sir, look at his votes upon the celebrated Atherton resolutions. The third resolution is in the following words:

“3d. *Resolved*, That Congress has no right to do that indirectly which it cannot do directly, and that the agitation of the subject of slavery in the District of Columbia, or the territories, as a means, and with the view of disturbing or overthrowing that institution in the several States, is against the true spirit and meaning of the Constitution, an infringement of the rights of the States affected, and a breach of the public faith upon which they entered into the confederation.”

Upon the passage of the resolution the yeas were 164, nays 40. Amongst the nays was Millard Fillmore! And here, sir, in this negative vote of Mr. F., in company with the most notorious abolitionists in the Union, we have the extraordinary and startling opinion announced that Congress has the right to do indirectly what it cannot do directly, and that the agitation of the subject of slavery in the District of Columbia, or the *Territories*, as a *means* and with a *view* of disturbing or overthrowing that institution in the several States, *is neither* against the true spirit and meaning of the Constitution, or an infringement of the rights of the States affected, or a breach of the public faith upon which they entered into the Union! The fifth resolution is as follows:

“5th. *Resolved, therefore*, That all attempts on the part of Congress to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia or the territories, or to prohibit the removal of slaves from State to State, or to discriminate between the institutions of one portion of the Confederacy and another with the views aforesaid, are in violation of the Constitution, destructive of the fundamental principle on which the union of these States rests, and beyond the jurisdiction of Congress; and that every petition, memorial, resolution, proposition, or paper, touching or relating in any way or to any extent whatever to slavery as aforesaid, or the abolition thereof, shall, on the presentation thereof, without any further action thereon, be laid upon the table without being debated, printed, or referred.”

Upon this resolution Mr. F. voted in the negative. And what does he assert by this vote? That attempts upon the part of Congress to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia or the *Territories*, or to prohibit the removal of slaves from State to State, or to discriminate between the institutions of one portion of the Confederacy and another, with the view of overthrowing the institution of slavery in the several States, are *not* in violation of the Constitution—are *not* destructive of the fundamental principles upon which the Union of these States rests, and are *not* beyond the jurisdiction of Congress!

Sir, has Gerritt Smith, or Arthur Tappan, or the most vile and rabid abolitionist ever gone further than this? And can it be believed that a man, who by his solemn votes has asserted these monstrous principles, would not sanction the Wilnot Proviso? Nay, sir, do not these recorded votes declare in terms, not only that Congress may prohibit the introduction of slavery into the Territories of the Union, but that Congress may abolish slavery in the Territories where it may already exist? Sir, there is not a doctrine advocated by the wildest enthusiast of abolition in the United States which goes one step beyond the principles sanctioned by the voice and votes of Millard Fillmore. And yet he has been selected by Southern Whigs as their candidate for the second office in the gift of the people! Sir, is the South prepared to sustain the claim? If so, then it deserves the curse and the fate of him who sold his birth-right for a mess of pottage. Sir, I put it to the candor and good sense of every Southern man, what has the South to gain in what most deeply concerns its welfare, its prosperity, its very existence, by the election of General Taylor and Millard Fillmore? And what will the country gain in other respects by their success and the triumph of the Whig party in the approaching contest? What is to be the policy of General Taylor's administration? What measures for the public good will he adopt or recommend? Has the Philadelphia Convention which nominated him given any exposition of the character of his administration? Has any of his friends upon this floor or elsewhere told us what features are to be stamped upon his foreign or domestic policy? Has he made known to the public, whose suffrages he solicits, what are his opinions upon any of the great political questions which have divided the parties of this nation? No, sir, we are told none of these things. The great Whig party of the United States, numbering in its ranks nearly one half of the American people, and claiming a large share of the wealth, intelligence, and decency of the country—heretofore the able and ardent advocates of great fundamental measures of Government—now suddenly hides the light of its principles, as under a bushel, and arraying itself under the banner of a military chieftain, goes to battle only with the war cry of Old Zach and Whitey—Monterey and Buena Vista! What a humiliating spectacle is thus presented to the world!

Sir, in the nomination of Gen. Taylor, the Whig party has *grounded its arms* upon all the great issues for which it has heretofore contended, and has acknowledged that its principles cannot bear the test of public scrutiny and trial. How is this, sir? Have Whig principles become so odious, and Whig measures so unpopular, that no man who professes them can be elected President of the United States? Are the Whigs driven to the miserable expedient so successfully practised in 1840, of availing themselves of the personal popularity of a man void of political principles or experience, to foist themselves into power? And power to what end—for what object—for whose benefit? Is it that they may divide out amongst themselves the contemptible spoils of victory, the "loaves and fishes" of Executive patronage? Is it to establish another National Bank, or to galvanize into existence that putrescent mass of corruption which, though dead and buried, yet stinks in the nostrils of the American people? Is it to restore a protective tariff, that fraudulent system of partial and unjust taxation by which the rich are made richer and the poor poorer? that system of legalized robbery by which millions are filched from the pockets of honest men to build up a monied aristocracy in the persons of northern manufacturing lordlings? Is it to establish a wasteful system of public expenditure in the shape of internal improvements, to corrupt the people and render them subservient to the monied power? Is it to disgrace your statute book with another bankrupt law, by which honest



creditors are to be cheated out of their dues, and perjury and fraud be rewarded by exemptions from pecuniary liability? Are these and other kindred measures, heretofore the favorite subjects of Whig legislation, to be the fruits of success in this play of "hide and seek," this game of political trickery, at which the Whig leaders are becoming so expert? May God, in his infinite mercy, pass such a cup from the lips of the people! Sir, let them look to it, that they are not made to drink its bitter dregs. Let the memorable example of 1840 warn them of the danger of trusting to this "no party" cry of Whigery and its adopted leader.

And now, sir, I come to ask and to answer, what is the South, what is the whole country to gain by the success of the Democratic nominees?

Sir, the opinions and position of Gen. Cass, upon the subject of slavery, have been deliberately formed and openly avowed to the American people. His sentiments are not left to vague conjecture, or contradictory construction. Whilst Gen. Taylor is urged upon the South, because from his residence and interest he is supposed and alledged to be opposed to the Wilmot Proviso; and upon the North, because he is believed to be in its favor, or pledged not to veto it if passed by Congress; whilst the position of Gen. Taylor is like the Delphi oracle, giving out its responses to suit the wishes and tastes of those who consult it, Gen. Cass has spoken in direct and unequivocal language to all. He has declared himself, *in terms*, the unyielding opponent of the jurisdiction of Congress over the subject of slavery in any form whatever. In his letter to Mr. Nicholson, he takes open, manly, decisive ground. In his letter to the Committee of the Baltimore Convention, he gives an explicit adhesion to all the principles adopted by that body, one of which lays down the Democratic platform upon the subject of slavery. Sir, if Gen. Cass should be elected President, and Congress should pass any law embracing the principles of that odious and infamous proviso, he stands pledged in solemn form to interpose the Executive veto. He cannot, he will not, he *dare* not violate that pledge. He could not do so, without dishonor, and without bringing down upon his head the just execration of a defrauded and insulted constituency. But, sir, we have not only the express declaration of his opinions upon this subject—we have more. We have his recorded vote in the Senate of the United States, in conformity with these opinions. When the treaty with Mexico was under consideration in that body, Mr. Baldwin, of Connecticut, a Whig Senator, moved that the treaty be amended by inserting the Wilmot Proviso, and making it applicable to all the territory acquired by it. The name of Lewis Cass is recorded, along with all the Southern Senators, against the motion.

Sir, I know that it has been charged by Southern Whigs, that Gen. Cass is the advocate and friend of the Wilmot proviso, and has given it the support of his voice and vote. I deny the charge, and challenge the proof. Nay, sir, it is proved to be false. His voice and votes have, upon all proper occasions, been brought to bear against this unjust and unconstitutional provision. He has ever stood, as he now stands, the able and fearless champion of the constitutional rights of the South and of the Union. Has he no claims, then, upon the sympathy, the friendship, and the support of the South? Whilst every Whig leader at the North has taken open ground against the South—whilst many distinguished Democrats have abandoned their ancient faith, and ranged themselves under the banner of a hideous fanaticism, which, like another Juggernaut, threatens to crush the whole Union under its bloody wheels—whilst Gen. Cass has been derided at the North by the whole pack of Abolition bloodhounds, as a "dough face"—whilst he has been charged with deserting the North and clinging to the

South—whilst he has been abandoned by many of his own political friends for his manly adherence to Southern constitutional rights, he stands erect amidst the storm which threatens to destroy him, with the pillars of the Constitution firmly grasped within his hands. He is the bold, open, manly friend of the rights, of both North and South, and the able defender of those sacred guaranties of the Constitution, upon which they depend. Why should the South now, in the hour of need, desert *him* who has never deserted *her*? Sir, the support of this man by the whole Southern States in the approaching election, is alike due to gratitude, to justice, to interest, and self-preservation.

It has been objected, that the position assumed by Gen. Cass, and approved by the great body of the Democratic party in every section of the Union, that Congress has no power over the question of slavery, and that it belongs exclusively to the people of the territories themselves, is worse for the South than the doctrine of the Wilmot proviso. We are told that slavery is now excluded from New Mexico and California, and that the question must be decided against the South, if left to their inhabitants. Sir, suppose this be true, how much worse off are we than if the jurisdiction be left to Congress? If the power be admitted to the Federal Government, who does not see (and know that the adoption of the Wilmot proviso is inevitable. The only guarantee against its adoption at the present moment, is the constitutional scruples of Northern Democrats, and the exercise of the veto power. Remove these by admitting the constitutional power, and the Wilmot proviso is fastened upon us for all time to come. What, then, can the South lose by leaving the question to the people of the Territories, rather than to the Congress of the United States? Sir, I do not propose to argue the question of constitutional power, either in Congress or the Territories, over this subject. Much difference of opinion exists as to whether the power is in the Federal Government, or in the hands of the people of the Territories. These questions have been ably argued by those who have gone before me in this debate, and I do not intend to occupy the time of the Committee in their renewed discussion. It is admitted, however, by all parties, that there is a point of time at which this question of slavery or no slavery may be, and must be, decided by the people of the Territories. When they meet in convention, in the exercise of sovereign authority, to form a constitution preparatory to admission into this Union as a State, *then* they may regulate this question of slavery at pleasure. The only difference of opinion upon the point is, whether the people may or may not, under the Constitution, exercise this power by territorial legislation, prior to the formation of a State constitution. Sir, without discussing or deciding the question, I do not consider it a matter of essential importance to the South, at what time this power may be exercised by the people of the Territories. It is, in my opinion, of infinitely more importance, both to the South and to the Union, that the power be left to the Territories instead of the Federal Government. Sir, does it follow, that if the power be left to the people in their territorial capacity, slavery will necessarily be excluded? Is it true, sir, that slavery is at this moment prohibited in New Mexico and California? It is admitted that the Constitution of Mexico declares that slavery shall not exist in the States of that Republic. But, sir, California and New Mexico are no longer portions of the Mexican nation. They have been, by treaty, transferred, as territories or provinces, to the United States; and at the very moment of the transfer, *eo instanti*, the constitutional provisions of the Mexican Government ceased their operation, and those of our Constitution assumed their place. The Constitution of the United States recognises the existence of slavery, and protects its enjoyment. These Territories are common property of all the people of all the States. Until, therefore,



legislative power shall be exercised by some tribunal having jurisdiction, the whole question of slavery in these Territories is left in abeyance, and the country open to the emigration of all. Now, sir, whether the people in their territorial capacity can constitutionally or rightfully exclude slavery, I am willing to leave to the decision of the Supreme Court, which many gentlemen contend is the proper and constitutional tribunal for its decision, or to the consideration and judgment of the people themselves. It is a principle in human nature, as powerful as universal, that political action of communities will be regulated and controlled by the interests of the parties concerned. If, therefore, it shall appear that slave labor may be profitably employed in these new Territories of the Union, and the people are left free to act, they will adopt the institution of slavery. If, on the other hand, it shall be found that the climate and soil are not adapted to the profitable employment of slave labor, no slaves will ever find their way into the country, however wide the door may be opened for their admission. All that the South, therefore, can, or ought to ask is, that the people of the Territories be left to decide this most important question for themselves. If their interest dictates it, slavery will be established in spite of the prejudices either of Mexican residents, or those who may emigrate from the States of this Government. Experience teaches that the Yankee who moves to and settles at the South, where slave labor is profitable, is as willing and ready to own slaves, aye, and to task them too, as those who have been born and bred up in their midst. That zeal for human freedom so patriotically cultivated and proclaimed in their native land, like the courage of Bob Acres, "oozes out at their fingers' ends," as soon as they come under the genial sun of Southern slavery. The promptings of ambition and interest soon overcome the prejudices of early education. If slavery, then, cannot be profitably introduced into the country, it will never go there, although you may pass laws recognising its existence, and protecting its enjoyment.

If it be profitable, depend upon it the people will have it in spite of prejudice, if you do not prohibit it by Congressional legislation. Let, therefore, this exciting, distracting, disturbing subject be left to the judgment and decision of those who will be most deeply interested in it, and affected by it. There it will be coolly considered and properly decided, and as a Southern man I am willing to trust the decision and abide the result. Let it be kept out of the Halls of Congress, for here, and here only, will the exercise of this dangerous and disputed power put this experiment of a Federal Union to the severest test. If Congress shall exercise this power here by the adoption of the Wilmot proviso in the organization of governments for the Territories acquired from Mexico, and it shall not be arrested by the Executive veto, my firm conviction is that it will result in a dissolution of the Union. Sir, I speak only for myself as a member of this House and as a citizen of a Southern State, but I believe I speak the sentiment of the whole South, if the Wilmot proviso, as applicable to territory south of  $36^{\circ} 30'$ , shall become a law by the will of Congress and the sanction of the President, while I have the honor of a seat here, I shall be ready to walk out of this Capitol with the majority of the Southern members, and never enter it again as a Representative of the people, until the Southern States, in solemn convention, shall decide upon the question of separation or union. In my opinion, after such an act of flagrant injustice and unconstitutional encroachment, the Southern States could not remain in the Union without dishonor, and the sacrifice of principles and interests too dear ever to be surrendered whilst one voice remained to assert, or one arm was left to defend them.

Sir, let not our Northern brethren be deluded with the hope or belief that Southern rights may be violated or Southern pride be trampled upon with impunity. The same spirit which animated our sires in the days of the Revolution, and nerved their lion hearts and stalwart arms against British oppression and outrage, still burns in the bosoms of their sons, and will repel, at any sacrifice, every attempt to encroach upon their constitutional rights and interests. Sir, the memorable words of Edmund Burke, uttered in the British Parliament in 1775, are no less true at the present day: "There is a circumstance attending these colonies (Southern) which makes the spirit of liberty still more high and haughty than in those to the northward. It is that in Virginia and the Carolinas they have a vast multitude of slaves. Where this is the case in any part of the world, those who *are* free are by far the most proud and jealous of their freedom. Freedom is to them not only an enjoyment, but a kind of rank and privilege—not seeing there, that freedom as in countries where it is a common blessing, and as broad and general as the air, may be united with much abject toil, with great misery, with all the exterior of servitude, liberty looks among them like something that is more noble and liberal. I do not mean, sir, to commend the superior morality of this sentiment, which has as much pride as virtue in it; but I cannot alter the nature of man. The fact is so; and these people of the Southern colonies are much more strongly, and with a higher and more stubborn spirit, attached to liberty than those to the Northward. Such were all the ancient commonwealths; such were our Gothic ancestors; such, in our day, were the Poles; and such will be all masters of slaves who are not slaves themselves. In such a people the haughtiness of domination combines with the spirit of freedom, fortifies it, and renders it invincible."

Sir, this indomitable spirit of liberty still glows in every Southern breast. Beware, sir, how you attempt to insult it by the passage of laws derogatory to its honor, its interests, and its rights. Sir, the law which proclaims the adoption of the Wilmot proviso in the territories of New Mexico and California, will sound the death knell of this Republic. A catastrophe so deplorable; so fatal to liberty, so destructive of all the glorious associations of the past, and all the bright and brilliant hopes of the future greatness of our beloved country, can alone be averted by the exercise of that noble spirit of compromise, conciliation, and harmony which actuated our patriotic sires who constructed our Constitution, that proudest of all human fabrics for the preservation of human liberty and the happiness of a mighty people. Sir, I invoke that spirit now to save the Union; but if this call upon our Northern brethren be made in vain, I invoke the South, as she loves the Union, as she values liberty, as she cherishes her own honor, her dearest interests, and her most sacred rights, to unite as one man to preserve them all inviolate, by contributing all honorable means in elevating to power those, and those only, who are able and willing to preserve them.